

THE LITTLE SHEPHERD OF KINGDOM COME

"There have been some surprising desertions from the Confederate ranks," said the General, as he wrote. "That's the trouble." He looked at his watch as he handed the message over his shoulder to Chad. "You have ten hours before sunrise and it is nearly sixty miles there and back. If you are not here with a stay of execution both will be shot. Do you think that you can make it? Of course you need not bring the message back yourself. You can get the Commandant to telegraph—" The slam of a door interrupted him—Chad was gone.

Harry was holding Dixie's bridle when he reached the street and Chad swung into the saddle.

"Don't tell them at home," he said. "I'll be back here on time, or I'll be dead."

The two grasped hands. Harry nodded dumbly and Dixie's feet beat the rhythm of her matchless gallop down the quiet street. The sensitive little mare seemed to catch at once the spirit of her rider. Her haunches quivered. She tossed her head and champed her bit, but not a pound did she pull as she settled into an easy lope that told how well she knew that the ride before her was long and hard. Out they went past the old cemetery, past the shaft to Clay rising from it, silvered with moonlight, out where the picket fires gleamed, and swinging on toward the Capital, unchallenged,

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for the moon showed the blue of Chad's uniform and his face gave sign that no trivial business, that night, was his. Over quiet fields and into the aisles of sleeping woods beat that musical rhythm ceaselessly, awakening drowsy birds by the wayside, making bridges thunder, beating on and on up hill and down until picket fires shone on the hills that guard the Capital. Through them, with but one challenge, Chad went, down the big hill, past the Armory, and into the town—pulling panting Dixie up before a wondering sentinel who guarded the Commandant's sleeping quarters.

"The Commandant is asleep."

"Wake him up," said Chad, sharply. A staff-officer appeared at the door in answer to the sentinel's knock.

"What is your business?"

"A message from General Ward."

"The Commandant gave orders that he was not to be disturbed."

"He must be," said Chad. "It is a matter of life and death."

Above him a window was suddenly raised and the Commandant's own head was thrust out.

"Stop that noise," he thundered. Chad told his mission and the Commandant straightway was furious.

"How dare General Ward broach that matter again? My orders are given and they will not

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be changed." As he started to pull the window down, Chad cried:

"But, General—" and at the same time a voice called down the street:

"General!" Two men appeared under the gas-light—one was a sergeant and the other a frightened negro.

"Here is a message, General."

The sash went down, a light appeared behind it, and soon the Commandant, in trousers and slippers, was at the door. He read the note with a frown.

"Where did you get this?"

"A sojer come to my house out on the edge o' town, suh, and said he'd kill me to-morrow if I didn't hand dis note to you pussonally."

The Commandant turned to Chad. Somehow his manner seemed suddenly changed.

"Do you know that these men belonged to Morgan's command?"

"I know that Daniel Dean did and that the man Dillon was with him when captured."

Still frowning savagely, the Commandant turned inside to his desk and a moment later the staff-officer brought out a telegram and gave it to Chad.

"You can take this to the telegraph office yourself. It is a stay of execution."

"Thank you."

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Chad drew a long breath of relief and gladness and patted Dixie on the neck as he rode slowly toward the low building where he had missed the train on his first trip to the Capital. The telegraph operator dashed to the door as Chad drew up in front of it. He looked pale and excited.

"Send this telegram at once," said Chad.

The operator looked at it.

"Not in that direction to-night," he said, with a strained laugh, "the wires are cut."

Chad almost reeled in his saddle—then the paper was whisked from the astonished operator's hand and horse and rider clattered up the hill.

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At head-quarters the Commandant was handing the negro's note to a staff-officer. It read:

"You hang those two men at sunrise to-morrow, and I'll hang you at sundown."

It was signed "John Morgan," and the signature was Morgan's own.

"I gave the order only last night. How could Morgan have heard of it so soon, and how could he have got this note to me? Could he have come back?"

"Impossible," said the staff-officer. "He wouldn't dare come back now."

The Commandant shook his head doubtfully, and just then there was a knock at the door and

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the operator, still pale and excited, spoke his message:

"General, the wires are cut."

The two officers stared at each other in silence.

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Twenty-seven miles to go and less than three hours before sunrise. There was a race yet for the life of Daniel Dean. The gallant little mare could cover the stretch with nearly an hour to spare, and Chad, thrilled in every nerve, but with calm confidence, raced against the coming dawn.

"The wires are cut."

Who had cut them and where and when and why? No matter—Chad had the paper in his pocket that would save two lives and he would be on time even if Dixie broke her noble heart, but he could not get the words out of his brain—even Dixie's hoofs beat them out ceaselessly:

"The wires are cut—the wires are cut!"

The mystery would have been clear, had Chad known the message that lay on the Commandant's desk back at the Capital, for the boy knew Morgan, and that Morgan's lips never opened for an idle threat. He would have ridden just as hard, had he known, but a different purpose would have been his.

An hour more and there was still no light in the East. An hour more and one red streak had shot

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upward; then ahead of him gleamed a picket fire—a fire that seemed farther from town than any post he had seen on his way down to the Capital—but he galloped on. Within fifty yards a cry came:

"Halt! Who comes there?"

"Friend," he shouted, reining in. A bullet whizzed past his head as he pulled up outside the edge of the fire and Chad shouted indignantly:

"Don't shoot, you fool! I have a message for General Ward!"

"Oh! All right! Come on!" said the sentinel, but his hesitation and the tone of his voice made the boy alert with suspicion. The other pickets about the fire had risen and grasped their muskets. The wind flared the flames just then and in the leaping light Chad saw that their uniforms were gray.

The boy almost gasped. There was need for quick thought and quick action now.

"Lower that blunderbuss," he called out, jestingly, and kicking loose from one stirrup, he touched Dixie with the spur and pulled her up with an impatient "Whoa," as though he were trying to replace his foot.

"You come on!" said the sentinel, but he dropped his musket to the hollow of his arm, and, before he could throw it to his shoulder again, fire flashed under Dixie's feet and the astonished rebel

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saw horse and rider rise over the pike-fence. His bullet went overhead as Dixie landed on the other side, and the pickets at the fire joined in a fusillade at the dark shapes speeding across the bluegrass field. A moment later Chad's mocking yell rang from the edge of the woods beyond and the disgusted sentinel split the night with oaths.

"That beats the devil. We never touched him. I swear, I believe that hoss had wings."

Morgan! The flash of that name across his brain cleared the mystery for Chad like magic. Nobody but Morgan and his daredevils could rise out of the ground like that in the very midst of enemies when they were supposed to be hundreds of miles away in Tennessee. Morgan had cut those wires. Morgan had every road around Lexington guarded, no doubt, and was at that hour hemming in Chad's unsuspecting regiment, whose camp was on the other side of town, and unless he could give warning, Morgan would drop like a thunderbolt on it, asleep. He must circle the town now to get around the rebel posts, and that meant several miles more for Dixie.

He stopped and reached down to feel the little mare's flanks. Dixie drew a long breath and dropped her muzzle to tear up a rich mouthful of bluegrass.

"Oh, you beauty!" said the boy, "you wonder!" And on he went, through woodland and

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field, over gully, log, and fence, bullets ringing after him from nearly every road he crossed.

Morgan was near. In disgust, when Bragg retreated, he had got permission to leave Kentucky in his own way. That meant wheeling and making straight back to Lexington to surprise the Fourth Ohio Cavalry; representing himself on the way, one night, as his old enemy Wolford, and being guided a short cut through the edge of the Bluegrass by an ardent admirer of the Yankee Colonel—the said admirer giving Morgan the worst tirade possible, meanwhile, and nearly tumbling from his horse when Morgan told him who he was and sarcastically advised him to make sure next time to whom he paid his compliments.

So that while Chad, with the precious message under his jacket, and Dixie were lightly thundering along the road, Morgan's Men were gobbling up pickets around Lexington and making ready for an attack on the sleeping camp at dawn.

The dawn was nearly breaking now, and Harry Dean was pacing to and fro before the old Court-House where Dan and Rebel Jerry lay under guard—pacing to and fro and waiting for his mother and sister to come to say the last good-by to the boy—for Harry had given up hope and had sent for them. At that very hour Richard Hunt was leading his regiment around the Ashland woods where the

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enemy lay; another regiment was taking its place between the camp and the town, and gray figures were slipping noiselessly on the provost-guard that watched the rebel prisoners who were waiting for death at sunrise. As the dawn broke, the dash came, and Harry Dean was sick at heart as he sharply rallied the startled guard to prevent the rescue of his own brother and straightway delirious with joy when he saw the gray mass sweeping on him and knew that he would fail. A few shots rang out; the far rattle of musketry rose between the camp and town; the thunder of the "Bull Pups" saluted the coming light, and Dan and Rebel Jerry had suddenly—instead of death—life, liberty, arms, a horse each, and the sudden pursuit of happiness in a wild dash toward the Yankee camp, while in a dew-drenched meadow two miles away, Chad Buford drew Dixie in to listen. The fight was on.

If the rebels won, Dan Dean would be safe; if the Yankees—then there would still be need of him and the paper over his heart. He was too late to warn, but not, maybe, to fight—so he galloped on.

But the end came as he galloped. The amazed Fourth Ohio threw down its arms at once, and Richard Hunt and his men, as they sat on their horses outside the camp picking up stragglers, saw a lone scout coming at a gallop across the still,

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gray fields. His horse was black and his uniform was blue, but he came straight on, apparently not seeing the rebels behind the ragged hedge along the road. When within thirty yards, Richard Hunt rode through a roadside gate to meet him and saluted.

"You are my prisoner," he said, courteously.

The Yankee never stopped, but wheeled, almost brushing the hedge as he turned.

"Prisoner—hell!" he said, clearly, and like a bird was skimming away while the men behind the hedge, paralyzed by his daring, fired not a shot. Only Dan Dean started through the gate in pursuit.

"I want him," he said, savagely.

"Who's that?" asked Morgan, who had ridden up.

"That's a Yankee," laughed Colonel Hunt.

"Why didn't you shoot him?" The Colonel laughed again.

"I don't know," he said, looking around at his men, who, too, were smiling.

"That's the fellow who gave us so much trouble in the Green River Country," said a soldier. "It's Chad Buford."

"Well, I'm glad we didn't shoot him," said Colonel Hunt, thinking of Margaret. That was not the way he liked to dispose of a rival.

"Dan will catch him," said an officer. "He

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wants him bad, and I don't wonder." Just then Chad lifted Dixie over a fence.

"Not much," said Morgan. "I'd rather you'd shot him than that horse."

Dan was gaining now, and Chad, in the middle of the field beyond the fence, turned his head and saw the lone rebel in pursuit. Deliberately he pulled weary Dixie in, faced about, and waited. He drew his pistol, raised it, saw that the rebel was Daniel Dean, and dropped it again to his side. Verily the fortune of that war was strange. Dan's horse refused the fence and the boy, in a rage, lifted his pistol and fired. Again Chad raised his own pistol and again he lowered it just as Dan fired again. This time Chad lurched in his saddle, but recovering himself, turned and galloped slowly away, while Dan—his pistol hanging at his side—stared after him, and the wondering rebels behind the hedge stared hard at Dan.

All was over. The Fourth Ohio Cavalry was in rebel hands, and a few minutes later Dan rode with General Morgan and Colonel Hunt toward the Yankee camp. There had been many blunders in the fight. Regiments had fired into each other in the confusion and the "Bull Pups" had kept on pounding the Yankee camp even while the rebels were taking possession of it. On the way

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they met Renfrew, the Silent, in his brilliant Zouave jacket.

"Colonel," he said, indignantly—and it was the first time many had ever heard him open his lips—"some officer over there deliberately fired twice at me, though I was holding my arms over my head."

"It was dark," said Colonel Hunt, soothingly. "He didn't know you."

"Ah, Colonel, he might not have known *me*—but he must have known this jacket."

On the outskirts of one group of prisoners was a tall, slender young lieutenant with a streak of blood across one cheek. Dan pulled in his horse and the two met each other's eyes silently. Dan threw himself from his horse.

"Are you hurt, Harry?"

"It's nothing—but you've got me, Dan."

"Why, Harry!" said Morgan. "Is that you? You are paroled, my boy," he added, kindly. "Go home and stay until you are exchanged."

So, Harry, as a prisoner, did what he had not done before—he went home immediately. And home with him went Dan and Colonel Hunt, while they could, for the Yankees would soon be after them from north, east, south and west. Behind them trotted Rebel Jerry. On the edge of town they saw a negro lashing a pair of horses along the turnpike toward them. Two white-

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faced women were seated in a carriage behind him, and in a moment Dan was in the arms of his mother and sister and both women were looking, through tears, their speechless gratitude to Richard Hunt.

The three Confederates did not stay long at the Deans'. Jerry Dillon was on the lookout, and even while the Deans were at dinner, Rufus ran in with the familiar cry that Yankees were coming. It was a regiment from an adjoining county, but Colonel Hunt finished his coffee, amid all the excitement, most leisurely.

"You'll pardon us for eating and running, won't you, Mrs. Dean?" It was the first time in her life that Mrs. Dean ever speeded a parting guest.

"Oh, do hurry, Colonel—please, please." Dan laughed.

"Good-by, Harry," he said. "We'll give you a week or two at home before we get that exchange."

"Don't make it any longer than necessary, please," said Harry, gravely.

"We're coming back again, Mrs. Dean," said the Colonel, and then in a lower tone to Margaret: "I'm coming often," he added, and Margaret blushed in a way that would not have given very great joy to one Chadwick Buford.

Very leisurely the three rode out to the pike-gate, where they halted and surveyed the advanc-

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ing column, which was still several hundred yards away, and then with a last wave of their caps, started in a slow gallop for town. The advance guard started suddenly in pursuit, and the Deans saw Dan turn in his saddle and heard his defiant yell. Margaret ran down and fixed her flag in its place on the fence—Harry watching her.

"Mother," he said, sadly, "you don't know what trouble you may be laying up for yourself."

Fate could hardly lay up more than what she already had, but the mother smiled.

"I can do nothing with Margaret," she said.

In town the Federal flags had been furled and the Stars and Bars thrown out to the wind. Morgan was preparing to march when Dan and Colonel Hunt galloped up to head-quarters.

"They're coming," said Hunt, quietly.

"Yes," said Morgan, "from every direction."

"Ah, John," called an old fellow, who, though a Unionist, believed in keeping peace with both sides, "when we don't expect you—then is the time you come. Going to stay long?"

"Not long," said Morgan, grimly. "In fact, I guess we'll be moving along now."

And he did—back to Dixie with his prisoners, tearing up railroads, burning bridges and trestles, and pursued by enough Yankees to have eaten him and his entire command if they ever could have caught him. As they passed into Dixie, "Light-

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ning" captured a telegraph office and had a last little fling at his Yankee brethren.

"Head-quarters, Telegraph Dept. of Ky., Confederate States of America"—thus he headed his "General Order No. 1" to the various Union authorities throughout the State.

"Hereafter," he clicked, grinning, "an operator will destroy telegraphic instruments and all material in charge when informed that Morgan has crossed the border. Such instances of carelessness as lately have been exhibited in the Bluegrass will be severely dealt with.

"By order of

"LIGHTNING,

"Gen. Supt. C. S. Tel. Dept."

Just about that time Chad Buford, in a Yankee hospital, was coming back from the land of ether dreams. An hour later, the surgeon who had taken Dan's bullet from his shoulder, handed him a piece of paper, black with faded blood and scarcely legible.

"I found that in your jacket," he said. "Is it important?"

Chad smiled.

"No," he said. "Not now."

XXV

AFTER DAWS DILLON—GUERRILLA

ONCE more, and for the last time, Chadwick Buford jogged along the turnpike from the Ohio to the heart of the Bluegrass. He had filled his empty shoulder-straps with two bars. He had a bullet wound through one shoulder and there was a beautiful sabre cut across his right cheek. He looked the soldier every inch of him; he was, in truth, what he looked; and he was, moreover, a man. Naturally, his face was stern and resolute, if only from habit of authority, but he had known no passion during the war that might have seared its kindness; no other feeling toward his foes than admiration for their unquenchable courage and miserable regret that to such men he must be a foe.

Now, it was coming spring again—the spring of '64, and but one more year of the war to come.

The capture of the Fourth Ohio by Morgan that autumn of '62 had given Chad his long-looked-for chance. He turned Dixie's head toward the foothills to join Wolford, for with